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ABSTRACT

This booklet has been prepared to inform and advise students applying for or just beginning internships. Former interns from 15 different programs in North Carolina were asked for specific and general advice about internships based on their own experiences. The answers they gave are presented in relation to general advice for a new intern, how to make sure the experience is worthwhile, what is the best way to get started, how to "bail yourself out" if in difficulty, how to relate to other interns, how to evaluate the internship experience, how to make the best use of a faculty counselor, how to work best with colleagues in your host agency, and dominant themes in internships. Related documents are HE 004 969 and HE 004 966. (Author/MJM)

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SERVICE-LEARNING INTERNSHIPS

How To Realize The Possibilities And Make The Most Of Them.

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North Carolina
Internship Office

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been prepared to inform and advise students applying for or just beginning internships.

Former interns from 15 different programs in North Carolina were asked for specific and general advice about internships based on their own experiences. The answers they gave are presented here.

Internships--service-learning experiences for college students--have become increasingly popular throughout North Carolina since 1970.

Service-learning internships combine the accomplishment of a public task with personal learning that is recognized for academic credit. The thesis of service-learning internships is that serving public and human needs provides a context for developing a service life style; for increasing our capacity to teach ourselves from experience; for strengthening our commitments to cultural values; and for honing our skills in goal setting, interpersonal relations, and work competencies.

This booklet has been prepared by the North Carolina Internship Office, sponsored by the North Carolina Board of Higher Education and the North Carolina Department of Administration. Robert Sigmon and Marlene Chasson of the North Carolina Internship Office have compiled the data from responses of former interns.

For further information about service-learning internship programs in North Carolina, contact the North Carolina Internship Office, 116 West Jones Street, Raleigh, North Carolina 27603.

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WHAT GENERAL ADVICE COULD YOU GIVE A NEW INTERN?

"Realize the possibilities and make the most of them. Jobs are hard to find."

"Boredom is the most frequent cry of the intern. What most interns don't realize is that most jobs are boring at some time or another--there are really very very very few jobs that are intellectually and personally stimulating and exciting. Once you realize this, it is easier to adjust to an internship without pulling hair because you're not out saving the world every second of the day. Also, to be mundane, be on time, dress as you are expected to dress, always be pleasant. You are a Public Relations example for future interns--more than one employer has been known to stop taking interns after a particularly bad experience."

"Do not let anything stand in your way. Ask 104 questions. Get a copy of Up The Organization. Work extra hours. Demand to meet the top people if only for one minute. Assume you must learn the entire operation in only three months."

"Read and think a lot. Don't be afraid, within the bounds of tact, to think radically or to talk about real change. Don't be a namby-pamby. If you've got something good, go to the top."

"Avoid the 'summer job' stigma which kills so many internships."

"Don't be timid. Have as much self confidence in a new experience as you can muster. The agency is glad to have you, and both you and the agency can work together to accomplish something worthwhile."

"Make friends with other interns and with agency people; you can learn from both. Use your theory background--but realize that practice is often more realistic and explanatory. Try not to become too disillusioned when things don't go the way they should. Take advantage of all your opportunities to learn. Your work will give you a basis to view later schooling and later experiences."

"Set a schedule and STICK TO IT. Begin writing your final report early. Don't wait until the end to write it all at once."

"Do not get an emotional elatement because of early progress in the program. About a third of the way through the course of the summer, you will encounter the apathy. That hurts the most. Keep digging. It will smooth over about the last week."

"One should work at a steady and even pace. It will be discouraging at times because you won't get some materials exactly when you need them. Eventually they will come."

HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE YOU ARE DOING SOMETHING WORTHWHILE?

"Clearly define your goals and objectives from the beginning. Otherwise you can't be sure that your project will be worthwhile."

"This is a philosophical question, probably at the heart of a considerable amount of our present generation—or more accurately-cultural conflict. There are numerous objective and subjective tests. One such test is getting results. Another is personal satisfaction. Obviously the problem of 'worthwhileness' is related to one's own values and definitions."

"Either latch on to someone who is doing something worthwhile and get him to let you do something for him (or just watch him—this can be a great education). Or map out your own project, get it approved and do it. It's useless to expect your employer to have something worthwhile for you to do. Most of them just don't know what to do with interns."

"Make your work relevant to the agency and not so 'ivory tower' that nothing ever comes of it."

"I keep a progress report. However, I question whether it is worthwhile or not. I've had some very discouraging moments as all interns do, I'm sure. Nevertheless, I find it helpful to keep some type of record of what is happening during the period of the project to use in order to keep myself posted on what has taken place and what has to take place in the future."

"I don't think you really can 'make sure' that you are doing something worthwhile, but one safety valve would be to do a good deal of reading in the general field related to the subject."

"The individual will have to decide for himself what is or isn't worthwhile, with an eye on any requirements placed upon him by his director."

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WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO GET STARTED?

"After you obtain an internship, the best way to start is to do some research and determine what has already been done in your area. This research will help determine your approach, your methodology—whether you should be doing primary research or whether you could use someone else's previous research as the basis for a service-oriented project."

"Research the project—find out what work has been done in this area, include Government Pamphlets, University Publications, previous Intern Reports. Become familiar with all the agencies, organizations, etc., who work in this area."

"Do some homework on your potential employer. Try to know him better than he knows himself."

"Discuss with faculty counselor and agency sponsor the aims of your project. A goal should be set at the beginning."

"Get the best possible orientation. Get assistance from fellow employees. Realize that there are some in the agency who want to see you have a meaningful experience."

"Have a clear understanding to begin: (1) who supervises the intern. (2) whether or not the intern can utilize office supplies, etc. (3) who pays for transportation."

"Don't be afraid to ask questions. Listen to suggestions and criticisms. Don't be afraid to ask for help."

HOW CAN YOU "BAIL YOURSELF OUT" IF IN DIFFICULTY?

"Try to use your own ingenuity and cleverness when in trouble—that's what internships are for."

"I don't like the term 'bail yourself out.' When difficulty arises, it is better to be honest about the situation and then make positive efforts to improve it--not waste time excusing what has happened."

"By putting the project aside for awhile and drinking a beer to cool yourself off from frustration."

"By all means try to do it on your own. It's a great experience! Difficulties do arise, but handling them yourself gives you a wonderful feeling of accomplishment. Use your ingenuity and don't give up."

"Use your director when necessary. Always be candid. Yell like hell when the situation warrants it. Go to the top with a complaint. Go early, be fair, but remember 10-12 weeks is a very short time."

"When first moving into an area, find one person that can help you if you get in trouble. This might be a minister, or a social worker, maybe even an especially concerned teacher. Call on them if trouble happens."

"Go to your faculty advisor for help."

"Let the internship leaders take over the problem.
Seek the help of other interns and employees.
Blame others in an attempt to take the blame off yourself.
Recognize the project for what it is--a trial and error experience!"

"Consult with fellow interns about the problem, re-direct your efforts. (or) Just give up."

"Discuss the problem with your supervisor—then go to the Internship Office if the discussion with the supervisor does not solve the problem."

HOW CAN YOU RELATE TO OTHER INTERNS?

"There is no real secret in relating to other interns. We talk of our projects and share experiences."

"If possible, avoid working with another of your own group. It is better to try your wings alone in the internship. Interns from other places, however, offer a good opportunity to learn from each other's experiences."

"Frequent contact--lunch, dinner, evenings, is the best way. Seminars and informal gatherings should be encouraged."

"Relating to other interns is a matter of talking to them and getting to know them outside the scope of the internship, when possible. At Mars Hill, the majority of our 'off-time' was spent 'hashing over' what went on during the day. Other interns are your most valuable resource as far as day to day problems and relations with your host agencies are concerned. Make sure to determine what's going on across the state in your interest area, also. Many times two or more interns are involved in the same project in different areas and can pool resources to the benefit of everyone."

"Share experiences--give and take advice. Discuss difficulties and ways for improvement."

HOW CAN YOU EVALUATE YOUR INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE?

"On the basis of what the intern is expected to achieve and what he actually does achieve. This evaluation should be based on objective observation and consideration."

"A diary can be of great service."

"How many influential people I was able to meet and work with. The hypothesis being that 'running with the horses' is the best way to learn as much as possible in a short time."

"Evaluate it in terms of what you learned and accomplished. Are you pleased with yourself? If so, you probably had a good experience. Think about it in relation to the future. How valuable will it be to you?"

"The most obvious grade is on the tangible progress achieved. But concrete accomplishments are relative to the changes in attitudes. An experience is successful if the community is committed to carrying on the project, or even if only two or so people are encouraged to work on it. As a learning experience, you must get straight in your head what you learned--and it is usually a lot."

"How much was I able to contribute to my agency? How much did I learn about (a) my area of work (b) my agency (c) State Government (d) how things really work? Did the agency find me a worthwhile employee?"

"Did it give new insights into people, problems, society, yourself? Will it help with your self-actualization process? Did you do any good for the agency? Are you more mature, independent, and/or concerned about something?"

HOW CAN YOU MAKE THE BEST USE OF A FACULTY COUNSELOR?

"I don't know. Mine never showed."

"He can direct a healthy reading program. He can direct the intern to people who could help in adding new perspectives to the internship."

"A faculty counselor can help by showing the relationship between the theoretical aspect of a socially oriented task and the actual participation in that task—how the theory differs from the actual involvement."

"The faculty counselor should not interfere with the project. The student should have the ultimate responsibility with the approval of the funding group."

"Get (an advisor) who will do his best to let the intern do as much as possible—preferably a young fellow who has lots of guts and will not 'isolate' the intern by an age gap."

"The only real help you need is someone who'll listen understandingly while you gripe about the things that are wrong with your internship."

"Perhaps a faculty counselor should be used only to help set goals and maybe to help evaluate."

"Frequent visits and talks. Define your objectives and give him a clear picture of your expectations—only then can he help you. Ask questions and make sure you understand his answers. Be completely truthful when expressing your feelings, and by all means don't 'put up a front' for him."

"In general, a faculty counselor is an excellent source of constructive criticism, a good sounding board of ideas, and a great help in preparing your final report."

HOW CAN YOU WORK BEST WITH COLLEAGUES IN YOUR HOST AGENCY?

"Always be pleasant and cooperative. Remember that you represent not only your school but the entire internship program. Although suggestions are frequently welcomed, they can be regarded as too critical. Observe, learn; do not become involved in office politics."

"The best relation that one can have is an open one. There should be an atmosphere of free speech..."

"One of the main problems in dealing with my colleagues in my internship was remembering that they had not had the cultural orientation that I had. Arguments will happen; they pass. Try not to side with one member of your group against another person or group."

"Be super-friendly, conscientious. Impress them with the amount of work you are willing to do and then do as best you can. (Be Horatio Alger, also.)"

"Try not to set yourself aside as a 'student intern'. Some of your most valuable experiences could come from general 'bull sessions' with the people in your agency. Develop a rapport with them, and earn their respect as a responsible individual--and I do mean individual--show them that you think for yourself, but are broad-minded."

"You first have to figure out the power lines and the cliques and personality clashes. I think the most effective tactic for an intern is complete neutrality. If you are looking for status or the way up the ladder, then hitch on to the coattails of someone who is going to go up. Make special friends with secretaries, etc., because they often have more information than the policy makers. In addition, they can help you in many ways."

"It is best to remember that host agencies don't exist solely for the perpetuation of internships. Try to retain an objective outlook, be yourself when dealing with people, and above all, have patience (the prime criteria for most internships)."

DOMINANT THEMES IN INTERNSHIPS

Former interns responding to this opportunity to offer advice to prospective interns identify some dominant themes associated with service-learning internships.

"The individual will have to decide for himself what is or isn't worthwhile" or "By all means try to do it on your own."

Of particular significance is the stress on the intern's own responsibility for selecting a task, getting started, getting out of trouble, securing personal satisfaction and relating to community leaders and faculty counselors. Learning is an individual matter. We can tune in or out, we can absorb, examine, initiate or use information and experience as we determine. Service-learning internships assist students realize the significance of experiential learning and student initiated learning.

"Go to your faculty advisor for help," "Consult with fellow interns," and "Discuss problems with your supervisor."

Support mechanisms are extremely important in assisting interns to accept personal responsibility and complete a public task in the total process of an internship. Having a task to pursue, an agency and staff with whom an intern associates, a faculty counselor, other interns, reflection seminars, and diaries are all support mechanism ingredients. This booklet of responses documents the importance of having access to persons and resouces. Direct personal engagement and shared decisions complement the theme of personal responsibility.

"Frequent contact," "Share experiences," "Don't be timid," "Make friends," "Be tactful," and "Ask 104 questions."

These responses highlight a theme that institutions, organizations and public problems are essentially focused on human relationships. I hear these interns suggesting that developing open and caring relationships is a vital part of the internship experience.

"Set a schedule and stick to it."

Another theme revolves around the constraint of time. Twelve weeks or a semester limit task objectives and follow-through opportunities. These time limitations call for careful planning and diligent execution to achieve both service and learning objectives.

"It is best to remember that host agencies don't exist solely for the perpetuation of internships."

Host agency and faculty counselor perceptions of student capabilities are another constraint theme. Agency hosts generally expect a product or service to be delivered. Faculty are unclear about the nature of the experiential learning taking place and how to relate to interns who believe they can both serve and learn during an internship. Perceptions of these support people need to be explored and understood by interns.

"Avoid the 'summer job' stigma which kills so many internships." Another theme highlighted is the distinction between a "summer job" and an "internship appointment." "Internships" are concerned with developing learning styles, awareness of public issues, skills in institutional behavior analysis, personal growth matters and useful activity on behalf of others. "Summer jobs" are generally concerned with earning dollars and productivity. "Internships" are developmental in nature, provide opportunities for earning dollars and academic credit, allow for independent learning, and usually result in contributing to the public good.

To those of you who read through this material to this point, have fun as you initiate or sustain your own journey.

Peace,

Bob Sigmon
May, 1972